

Modeling Scenarios for Journalism and Media Education

Mirjam Prenger & Mark Deuze, Mediastudies, University of Amsterdam

We run a professional master program in journalism and media at the University of Amsterdam in which the students combine theoretical knowledge and academic research into how the media function with the acquirement of a large set of journalistic skills. The focus of the program is on investigative journalism and media innovation. And as we all know, media innovation is omnipresent.

The practice of journalism is happening in more diverse, post-industrial settings than before, and are enacted by varying actors (Ahva, 2016, Deuze and Witschge, 2017). As a result, several journalism scholars have pointed out that journalism has become "liquid" (Deuze, 2008), "ambient" (Hermida, 2010) and increasingly "participatory" (Singer et al. 2011), while at the same time the position of journalists has become more precarious and their occupational value system is under pressure.

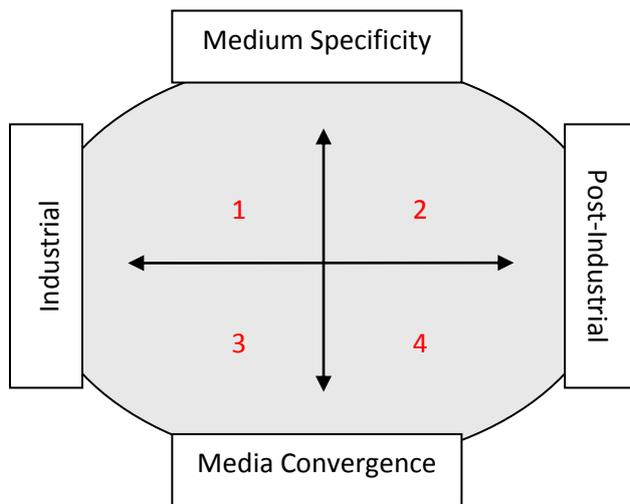
The economic problems and technological challenges facing the news business can appear daunting. But where some scholars are debating 'a crisis of journalism', we see a dynamic media landscape which provides all kinds of new opportunities for journalists and journalism. To a certain degree, the industry is changing faster than the teaching can keep up with.

What should the answer of journalism education be? Should we create a new way of learning, which is more suitable for contemporary (and future) circumstances? Focus on new tools and skills? Or take a step back and assess what the real challenge seems to be?

Let's start with the present and how journalism education around the world seems to adapt to the changes in journalism practice.

In order to prepare for the future, students need to be able to deal with several realities which can be plotted along two axes, ranging from medium specificity to media convergence, and from practicing journalism in industrial to post-industrial settings (see Figure I).

Figure I
Modeling Scenarios for Journalism and Media Education



In scenario 1, students are trained within dedicated media sequences – newspaper, magazine, television, online – with an eye toward future employment within the newsrooms of mainstream news organizations. This is the traditional and still dominant way of journalism education around the world (Deuze, 2006).

In scenario 2, students are encouraged to develop a medium-specific niche as well as a clear ‘unique selling point’ as a journalistic brand. This is the focus of an increasing number of programs within journalism education, embracing notions of entrepreneurialism in the curriculum (Mensing and Ryfe, 2013; Vázquez Schaich and Klein, 2013). The number of entrepreneurial journalism programs increased 10-fold across the United States in the past five years, with similar developments in Portugal and Spain, as well as in Australia and the UK. And here in The Netherlands various journalism programs (such as the University of Groningen, Fontys Tilburg etc) have placed entrepreneurialism on the forefront.

In scenario 3, the emphasis is on preparing students for a reality of cross-media and convergent newswork occurring within news companies that combine a print, broadcasting and online presence (Larrondo et al., 2016; Menke et al., 2016).

In scenario 4, training and education is based on the professional ideal of a so-called ‘backpack reporter’, focusing on a large array of flexible skills and an entrepreneurial mindset, so they can work in all kinds of different circumstances for different employers, enabling students to start their own businesses as independent freelancers or via startups (Blom and Davenport, 2012: 71).

Across these scenario's, various approaches have been propagated the last few years, such as the Teaching Hospital Model of Journalism Education (Reed, 2014) — learning by doing in a teaching newsroom, often to produce local news to offset a gap in the market left by retreating regional newsmedia — which can be situated within scenario's 1 and 3

But as David Ryfe and Donica Mensing have pointed out, the teaching hospital metaphor implies that journalism is a settled profession with clear boundaries that needs only to be practiced more rigorously, instead of a field with its most fundamental premises unraveling. As they write:

“Rather than creating conditions for students to help re-think journalistic practices, the teaching hospital model reinforces the conviction that content delivery is the primary purpose of journalism. Put simply, it makes it hard for students to think differently.” (Mensing and Ryfe, 2013: 2)

But the Entrepreneurial Model of Journalism Education that Ryfe and Mensing propagate, and which can be situated within scenario's 2 and 4, has its drawbacks as well. For one, with its opposition to “traditional” journalistic values (which are seen as a hindrance to innovation), its economic imperative and its focus on entrepreneurial skills and innovation-for-innovations-sake, the entrepreneurial approach can result in all kinds of ethical dilemmas which are rarely addressed. And secondly, the ideology and rhetoric of entrepreneurialism glosses over the precarious position of most journalists, whether independently working or employed. Take for instance the rather romantic picture of entrepreneurial journalism which some books present (Briggs, 2012; Marsden, 2017).

Similarly, the Teaching Hospital Model of Journalism Education generally does not address the sometimes less than ideal working conditions in newsrooms or the decline in autonomy journalists increasingly face. As such, all scenarios tend to paint rather idealistic portraits of the current working conditions in journalism, while at the same time propagating that their specific approach is the best way to prepare students for the future.

These types of criticism are relevant and should certainly be taken into account. However, our main point is that making a choice for a specific scenario is the wrong way forward. Current trends as well as research suggest that journalism is simultaneously solidifying – with parts of the industry embracing strategies along both axes – as well as liquefying, as individual journalists as well as teams within news organizations develop innovative ways to do journalism. A choice for either scenario or educational model would be unnecessary limiting students' potential.

The question for education in this context therefore is to develop a mission, pedagogy and curriculum that will enable students to move across the various forms of journalism on the spectrum. In order to do that, the basis of any program should be to train students to critically engage with the professional values as well as the realities and dilemmas of

journalistic work. Being able to critically reflect on the various scenarios, will help them to develop and advance new ways of doing journalism.

Journalism has a strong occupational value system which not only steers the day to day practices in and outside newsrooms, it is also a crucial and historical driving force behind all factors concerned with transformation, innovation and entrepreneurialism in journalism. Let me illustrate this with an example of a recent research project. Mark Deuze and I have researched what the motives and circumstances were that drove media innovation in the past and compared them to the emergence of the current startup culture in journalism worldwide (Prenger and Deuze, 2017).

There are striking similarities, one of the most important being the deference of the people involved to the basic values of the occupational ideology of journalism when proposing and defending their initiatives: truth and objectivity, ethics, public service, and autonomy. The founders of the new journalistic startups, for instance, often tend to be quite outspoken professionals, passionately voicing their enthusiasm for the new business and, correspondingly, an often-scathing critique of the existing news industry.

It is striking to see that such critiques are generally grounded in the most traditional, old-school values of the profession. Legacy news operations are attacked for not doing any 'real' journalism anymore – as they have to consider the market and advertisers, are limiting the ability of their reporters to do their work autonomously, are overcommitted to breaking and shortform news while curtailing efforts toward investigative reporting, or are too close to their political sources. Listening to startup founders, one is struck by a fascinating paradox: they proclaim to embrace and produce a 'new' kind of journalism while referencing 'old' values as the source of their insights and practices.

But of course the occupational values that are referred to should not be taken at face value, nor should one assume that they are set in stone. The interpretation of the occupational values changes over time, and is influenced by specific national (as well as organization-specific) journalistic cultures. It is key that students critically reflect on these values, to help them understand how it can help them think up new ways of doing journalism. Discussing core democratic values and associated practices, and debating ethics and professionalism has been an important focus point of Journalism Studies (Steensen and Ahva, 2015). This should also be the corner stone of journalism and media education programs (Donsbach, 2013; Anderson, 2014).

In that sense, the title of the panel session where this paper is presented ('Academic learning outcomes versus real world qualifications') points to a non-existent contradiction. Getting a grip on academic learning outcomes and understanding what they mean in relationship to the dynamics visible within the current media landscape is a prerequisite for acquiring real world qualifications.

Training the discursive reflexivity of journalism students vis-à-vis the occupational ideology and the current changes within the media landscape will help them deal with transformations in the occupational value systems and work practices in a much better way. The main focus should not be on teaching a particular skillset, but on teaching a specific mindset. Of course, skills are important and they certainly should be acquired, but ultimately they are just a means to an end.

Literature

Ahva L (2016) Practice Theory for Journalism Studies. *Journalism Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1139464

Anderson, CW (2014), The Sociology of the Professions and the Problem of Journalism Education. *Radical Teacher* 99

Blom R & Davenport L (2012) Searching for the Core of Journalism Education: Program Directors Disagree on Curriculum Priorities. *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 67(1)

Briggs M (2012) *Entrepreneurial Journalism: How To Build What's Next for News*. London: Sage

Deuze M (2006) Global journalism education: A conceptual approach. *Journalism Studies* 7(1)

Deuze M (2008) The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism and Monitorial Citizenship. *International Journal of Communication* 2

Deuze M & Witschge T (2017) Beyond journalism: Theorizing the transformation of journalism. *Journalism* 17(1)

Donsbach W (2013) Journalism as the new knowledge profession and consequences for journalism education. *Journalism* 15(6)

Hermida A (2010) Twittering the news: The emergence of ambient journalism. *Journalism Practice* 4(3)

Larrondo A, Domingo D, Erdal IJ, Masip P & Van den Bulck H (2016) Opportunities and Limitations of Newsroom Convergence. *Journalism Studies* 17(3)

Marsden P (2017) *Entrepreneurial Journalism: How to go it alone and launch your dream digital project*. London: Routledge

Menke M, Kinnebrock S, Kretschmar S, Aichberger I, Broersma M, Hummel R, Kirchhoff S, Prandner D, Ribeiro N & Salaverría R (2016) Convergence Culture in European Newsrooms. *Journalism Studies*. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2016.1232175

Mensing DH & Ryfe DM (2013) Blueprint for change: From the teaching hospital to the entrepreneurial model of journalism education. #ISOJ 2(2)

Vázquez Schaich MJ & Klein JS (2013) Entrepreneurial journalism education: Where are we now? *Observatorio* 7(4)

Prenger M & Deuze M (2017) A History of Innovation and Entrepreneurialism in Journalism. In P. Boczkowski & C. Anderson (Eds.), *Remaking the News. Essays on the Future of Journalism in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press

Reed K (2014) Before the “teaching hospital model” of journalism education: 5 questions to ask. Nieman Lab. Online at <http://www.niemanlab.org/2014/10/before-the-teaching-model-of-journalism-education-5-questions-to-ask/>, accessed May 17, 2017

Singer JB, Hermida A, Domingo D, Heinonen A, Paulussen S, Quandt T, Reich Z & Vujnovic M (2011) *Participatory Journalism in Online Newspapers: Guarding the Internet’s Open Gates*. New York: Wiley-Blackwell

Steensen S & Ahva L (2015). Theories of Journalism in the Digital Age: An exploration and introduction. *Journalism Practice* 9(1)